

# NYBG

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***...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...* Opens at The New York Botanical Garden, Debuting New and Site-Specific Work by Visual Artist Ebony G. Patterson**

On View May 27–September 17, 2023, the Exhibition Uses NYBG's Living and Preserved Plant Collections as Its Material and Inspiration to Explore the Tension between the Visible/Invisible and Desirable/Undesirable Revealed in the Control We Attempt to Exert on the Natural World through Gardens



*...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting* is a major site-specific exhibition of sculptural and horticultural installations at The New York Botanical Garden. (NYBG Photo)



Visual artist Ebony G. Patterson  
Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery  
Photo: Frank Ishman

**Bronx, NY**—The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) announces the opening of *...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...*, a major site-specific exhibition of sculptural and horticultural installations by visual artist Ebony G. Patterson that is the result of a yearslong engagement with the Botanical Garden to explore its collections and settings. As the first visual artist ever to embed within the institution for an immersive residency, Patterson worked directly with the Garden's grounds and collections to form a new body of work that includes sculptures, installations, and interventions with living plants, bringing her unique perspective on formal gardens to life in the galleries and landscape of the Garden's 250-acre National Historic Landmark site. The exhibition is on view Saturday, May 27 through Sunday, September 17, 2023.

As the title suggests, *...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...* pivots on the tension of transitional states, exploring the idea of molting, shedding, and decay as revelatory processes with the potential to give way to healing, regeneration, and beauty. Forming both a

sumptuous visual experience and an insightful societal critique, the exhibition celebrates and embraces the allure of the beautiful while contemplating what lies beneath the enticing surface, unearthing the complex tensions of the natural world and how they reflect entanglements of race, gender, and colonialism.

Known for her captivating tapestries and garden-inspired installations—typically created from faux flowers, glitter, sequins, fabric, toys, beads, jewelry, and other embellishments—Patterson will create a fully immersive experience at NYBG this spring and summer in and around the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory and in the LuEsther T. Mertz Library Building with major landscape interventions, large-scale indoor and outdoor installations, and new and recent work across media. The exhibition, related programming, and accompanying publication will provide unique insight into the artist's investigations of the inherent tensions around the ideas of beauty and desire and the potential for renewal in loss.

“The opportunity to work directly within The New York Botanical Garden, using its collections and landscape as inspiration, provided the opportunity to bring many elements of my practice together,” noted artist Ebony G. Patterson. “I’ve long worked with the idea of gardens, but this direct intervention allowed us to begin to literally peel back the landscape to look not only at the plants on the surface but also explore what lies beneath, and the generative life cycles that sustain the entire ecosystem. The plants and animals that clean, regenerate, and consume as an act of care are necessary for the survival of the entire ecosystem. This reality of the garden is often not highlighted and celebrated, an experience that is paralleled in many areas of society and a tension at the heart of my practice overall.”

*...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...* will uproot the verdant, colorful, and enticing elements of gardens—floral displays rich with color and fragrance that embrace the life cycle of plants through the seasons—with bold and provocative disruptions. The exhibition takes its name from the title of Patterson’s largest installation to date, *...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...* (2023), comprising both sculptural elements and living plants, which is installed both outdoors across the Haupt Conservatory Lawn and indoors in the Conservatory’s Seasonal Exhibition Galleries. A series of Patterson’s latest works on paper and installations will be on display in the Mertz Library Building, along with archival multimedia work exploring both gardens and uncultivated, wild nature.

“Ebony G. Patterson’s exhibition at The New York Botanical Garden marks an exciting moment for us as an institution, as we were able to provide a platform for one of the most compelling artists of our time to explore the complex symbolism of gardens and the fractured human relationship with nature,” said Jennifer Bernstein, CEO and The William C. Steere Sr. President of The New York Botanical Garden. “Patterson’s work will entice, disarm, and provoke visitors, and we look forward to the dialogue and conversations that will unfold.”

## Living Installations in and around the Haupt Conservatory

As visitors approach the Haupt Conservatory, hundreds of glittering vultures appear to have descended like shadows, gathering among blood-red, wound-like ruptures that interrupt a flowery expanse of purple summer snapdragon, lime-green zinnia, orange Mexican sunflower, deep burgundy cosmos, and other richly-colored blooms. From this outdoor component of the monumentally-scaled installation on the Lawn, visitors pass into the Conservatory, where the installation continues.

In the center of one of the Seasonal Exhibition Galleries, a cast-glass-and-hydrostone peacock roosts overhead. This figure peers back on its trailing tail, taking the form of an immersive garden of plants with variegated foliage, including caladium and hypoestes, and red flowers, such as begonias and impatiens, as visitors proceed through the glasshouses. Populated with vultures, along with ghostly cast-glass plants representing extinct species that Patterson researched in NYBG's William and Lynda Steere Herbarium, a repository of nearly eight million preserved plant specimens, the metaphor of deconstructed peacock tail as garden extends through multiple exhibition spaces.

In the pool at the center of the Conservatory's Palms of the World Gallery, visitors can see beneath the tail of the peacock, comprising a tangle of green foliage plants including ipomea, silver-inch plant, and love-lies-bleeding, to see the secrets of decay revealed underneath the garden's surface. In seeming contrast to their initial lush, colorful, and luxurious appearance, these living installations embrace the full cycle of decomposition alongside the promise of regeneration and regrowth.

## Exhibits in the Mertz Library Building

In the Library Building galleries, Patterson's latest works on paper and installations are presented along with archival multimedia work in which the artist employs densely patterned, entangled compositions representing gardens overtaking and concealing insects, snakes, birds, and human figures to engage the viewer in the act of looking, subverting the visual vocabulary of documentation—video, photography, scientific illustration—in works that invite consideration of the inherent power of the gaze as well as the often hidden truths that lie beneath the surface. Throughout, Patterson beckons the viewer to contemplate nature's potential to conceal but also to reveal evidence of exploitation and violence, as well as the potential of nature as a source of healing and empowerment through renewal and adaptation.

*The Observation: The Bush Cockerel Project, A Fictitious Historical Narrative* (2012), a three-channel projection and installation, offers views through a screen of vine-like hanging faux flowers of two human figures caring for an infant in a primordial tropical forest setting. The

piece touches on social and gender roles in acts of care for others, as well as how these are repositioned in a remote, edenic space.

A new installation, *...fester...* (2023), transforms a rotunda space into a nighttime garden with repeating wallpaper patterns. A series of the artist's richly embellished and patterned tapestries hang from the wall, partially concealing gold-leafed skeletal forms and suggesting the remnants of a garden that has been peeled away to reveal what lies beneath. Viewed in the round, the reverse side of the wall represents the freshly wounded earth with a cascade of over 1,000 red lace gloves, their root-like fingers revealing cast-glass thistles and cast-metal monstera leaves.

Installations of mixed media paper collages from the 2022 series *studies for a vocabulary of loss* combine highly-textured, torn, and reconstituted botanical illustrations and photographs of lilies, bird-of-paradise, carnivorous pitcher plants, mushrooms, stylized vines, snakes, scorpions, and highly patterned human arms. In this series of works suggestive of funerary wreaths, Patterson invites us to consider the potential for renewal in loss as a state that is anything but static.

## **Programming and Publication**

To celebrate the opening of *...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...*, NYBG will present *Ebony G. Patterson in Conversation with Thelma Golden* on Thursday, May 25, 2023, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. in NYBG's Arthur and Janet Ross Lecture Hall. In this dynamic conversation, the artist will speak with Thelma Golden, the world's premier curator of art of the African Diaspora and Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem. Tickets are \$35 for NYBG Members, \$39 for Non-Members.

In fall 2023, a fully illustrated exhibition catalog published by Rizzoli Electa will include essays by Joanna L. Groarke, Vice President of Exhibitions and Programming at The New York Botanical Garden; Karena Gore, founder and executive director of the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary; Abra Lee, a storyteller, horticulturist, and author; and Seph Rodney, Ph.D., visiting art critic at Yale Graduate School of Arts & Sciences and opinions editor at *Hyperallergic*. The volume will reflect on the concept of gardens as human-made interventions in nature, shedding new light on NYBG while providing new pathways for artistic engagement with the natural world. Images of works displayed in the Garden's landscape will be featured.

For more information, to sign up for ticket alerts, and to purchase tickets to *...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...*, please visit <https://www.nybg.org/event/ebony-g-patterson/>

## **About Ebony G. Patterson**

Ebony G. Patterson received her BFA in painting from Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, Jamaica, in 2004. She received an MFA degree in 2006 in printmaking and drawing from the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis. Patterson has taught at the University of Virginia and Edna Manley College School of Visual and Performing Arts; has served as Associate Professor in Painting and Mixed Media at the University of Kentucky; and was the Bill and Stephanie Sick Distinguished Visiting Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work is in the collections of institutions including 21c Museum and Foundation, Louisville, Kentucky; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California; Nasher Museum, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; the National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston; the Pérez Art Museum Miami; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky; Studio Museum in Harlem; the Virginia Museum of Fine Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Patterson is Co-Artistic Director, along with curator Miranda Lash, of Prospect.6 New Orleans, slated to open in Fall 2024.

## **About The New York Botanical Garden**

Founded in 1891, The New York Botanical Garden is the most comprehensive botanical garden in the world and an integral part of the cultural fabric of New York City, anchored in the Bronx. Visitors come to the Garden to connect with nature for joy, beauty, and respite, and for renowned plant-based exhibitions, music and dance, and poetry and lectures. Innovative children's education programs promote environmental sustainability and nutrition awareness, graduate programs educate the next generation of botanists, while engaging classes inspire adults to remain lifelong learners. The 250-acre verdant landscape—which includes a 50-acre, old-growth forest—and the landmark Enid A. Haupt Conservatory support living collections of more than one million plants. Unparalleled resources are also held in the LuEsther T. Mertz Library, the world's most important botanical and horticultural library with 11 million archival items spanning ten centuries, and William and Lynda Steere Herbarium, the largest in the Western Hemisphere with 7.8 million plant and fungal specimens. Committed to protecting the planet's biodiversity and natural resources, Garden scientists work on-site in cutting-edge molecular labs and in areas worldwide where biodiversity is most at risk.

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*...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...* is presented by:

Delta Air Lines

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Alturas Foundation supported the creation of *...fester...* as part of its Artist in Residence program. The Alturas Foundation Residency Program encourages artists to explore fresh directions and provides opportunities to develop new ideas over an extended period of time.

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Exhibitions in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory are made possible by the Estate of Enid A. Haupt.

**The New York Botanical Garden is located at 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458. For more information, visit [nybg.org](http://nybg.org)**

**The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.**

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